

HEGEL ON RELIGION AND ATHEISM

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It is often said – and there may be a grain of truth in it – that it is practically possible to understand any philosopher from a *single* basic idea of his. This somewhat belletristic contention holds true chiefly of those philosophers who have, in point of fact, devoted their whole oeuvre to the analysis of a single problem (as e. g. Socrates, Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche) – and applies least of all to those figures of the history of philosophy who did not try to attain an integrated conception of the universe through the solution of a single problem, but who considered it from the outset their object in life to formulate a complete world concept (as e. g. Plato, Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and most classic representatives of modern philosophy). As far as the latter are concerned – whether they have created a genuine system or not –, though we wish to analyze, from a modern standpoint, only one or other of their conceptions, we cannot avoid to pass judgment also on their „whole system”. This goes for Hegel too: even if our object is to examine only his doctrines concerning religion and atheism, such an analysis of a part of his system will necessarily bear on, and apply to, its entirety.

Objectively, it is therefore hardly necessary to give grounds for examining this or that part of Hegel's philosophy. All the more important is, however, the subjective side of the question, namely to indicate the point of view which has induced us to study just the particular problem chosen. On what score do we, in the midst of our numerous actual and urgent philosophical cares, deem also the subject at issue likewise urgent and actual?

a) Surely, we do not deal with Hegel simply because nowadays this becomes increasingly fashionable. Who can count the past Hegel-fashions, Hegel-renaissances, seeing that they have changed not only in time, from age to age, but have always differed also from country to country, and do so even today? In a theoretically shaky, but for the documentary practice useful book, W. Raimund Beyer distinguishes 15 types of Hegel-interpretations, beginning with the quondam left-wing and right-wing Hegelians, through the fascist, Catholic, Evangelical Hegel, down to the existentialist Hegel of our times, intimate mainly in French philosophy. Such a fashion may at the very best inspire men of letters avid of philosophical „sensations”; but serious philosophers are – more likely to be diverted by it to other subjects.

b) However, it is not some kind of individual reason, or personal sympathy either, which, in the second half of the 20th century, may prompt somebody to a careful analysis of Hegelian philosophy, since his ponderous and hopelessly abs-

tract, Germanic style can hardly be called fetching and prepossessing. Hegel's obscurity is – unfortunately – no legend, and the immanent, logical beauty of his oeuvre reveals itself only to those who with great asceticism and long, dreary labour have come to master his whole system. So this is no incentive either to delve into Hegel.

c) Apparently beyond dispute were an investigation into the history of philosophy (in the traditional philological sense of the word), which, reviewing and summarizing what has been written on Hegel, attempts a sound reconstruction of the *real* past, that is – by a thorough analysis of Hegel's concrete course of life, as well as of his historical and social determinations, etc. –, to form, from the mass of nebulous or contradictory data, a plausible conception of Hegel's true philosophical message. A model in this respect (I won't say whether an attractive or a deterrent one) could be W. Dilthey's „Jugendgeschichte Hegels“, which, on the basis of Hegel's early theological works, endeavours to prove that the irrationalism, mysticism, and pantheism of German romanticism had had a decisive influence on, and a determinative significance in Hegel's life and works, strongly accentuating its idealism and, indeed with a heavy distortion pushing into the background its dialectic character. How inadequate even the most circumstantial philological method proves in the history of philosophy (owing to the inevitable involvement of the historian's *own* position), is shown by the very fate of Dilthey's conception: György Lukács has devoted many years of painstaking labour to show that this „*theological period*“ of Hegel's was merely a reactionary legend taken over by Dilthey from Fr. Th. Vischer, the Hegelian turned renegade at the decline of life, who had tried to assert his own old-age mysticism against the rationalism of Hegel's dialectics. Undoubtedly, in the Lukács against Dilthey controversy it is not only two kinds of historical interpretation that confront each other, but also two sorts of ideological conception: the idealism of the *Geistesgeschichte* opposes the materialism of the marxist conception of history. However, even after deducing these „*ideological surpluses*“, we may regard as valid Lukács's accusation that Dilthey is trying to pit the „*young Hegel*“ against the „*mature Hegel*.“ This means that it is possible to attain certain objective research results also in the history of philosophy, in its traditional genre. Nevertheless, we do not wish to deal at present with Hegel in this sense either, and it is not our intention to settle the controversy about the „*young Hegel*“.

(Incidentally, as a matter of special interest, I wish to point out here that such a traditional history of philosophy is even today justified not only in a general way – as basic philological research pursued for the sake of a history of ideas and ideologies which can be built on it –, but also in the research into a host of special and interesting historical problems. A case in point is the young Hegel against mature Hegel question, which is discussed frequently nowadays also in regard to the works of the young Marx, but is well-known also in the earlier history of philosophy, as for instance Kant's period „preceding the Critiques“, etc. We are confronted here evidently with a special topic of psychological nature of the traditional history of philosophy, namely, with the philosophical „conversions“, something, inevitably remindful of Cardinal Newman's religious typology concerning the „*once born*“ optimists and the „*twice born*“ pessimists. There are very

intriguing questions, which neatly fit into the programme of a now renascent discipline, the psychology of history; but, as we have already said, in this address we do *not* wish to treat of Hegel even in this particular respect either.)

d) The next possible aspect would be to speak out what so many people conceal, when dealing with the history of a past philosophy, namely, to ask, to what extent a philosophical position of our days is supported by an old philosophy, and to what extent her author may be considered a forerunner of a present-day slant, etc. This standpoint can nowise be regarded as an unwarrantable intrusion, into the field of philosophy, of some external, or outright political, point of view; on the contrary, it definitely follows from the ideological character of philosophy, and is (since Plato) an almost general habit of philosophers: everybody emphasizes and exalts, from the long history of philosophy, what corroborates the soundness of his own doctrine, and this is a well-known, and generally accepted intellectual „quest of predecessors”. Notwithstanding, we are unable to pursue in good conscience *this* course, either, considering that – widespread as the method may be – it nevertheless implies, if carried through consequently, a complete philosophical relativism. For one adopting the standpoint of relativism there exists, however, only one consequent philosophical attitude: complete silence.

Of the three standpoints rejected so far, the last is, however, not only the least appealing, – owing to the *logical* argument of its self-contradictoriness –, but, strictly speaking, – it collides also with the ethics of scientific research, because it rejects, or accepts, philosophical predecessors not according to the objective weight of their message (an *elementary* duty in every branch of science), but on the more or less always subjective ground of whether they fit into the whole of its temporarily actual own conception, or not. György Lukács has devoted – as I said – at least ten years' work, a monumental monograph, to the refutation of Dilthey's then generally accepted conception of Hegel – which is indeed an adequate way of contraverting in the domain of the history of philosophy. The same cannot be said of Roger Garaudy's otherwise very noticeable monograph on Hegel (*Le Dieu est mort*), in which he presumes to „dispose” of all these efforts of Lukács's in an unsympathetic half-sentence of a single foot-note, claiming that Lukács distorts Hegel into a „forerunner of marxism”. (It is a specific oddity of this inadequate situation that classic German philosophy, and in it especially Hegel, rates together with the 18th century French materialists – also „officially” among the traditions of marxism).

2. How are we therefore to approach the problem concerning Hegel chosen for our theme, if we want to avoid all the hitherto outlined paralogsms? Professor Ayer has summed up his judgment on the philosophical research pursued in Hungary by saying that instead of philosophy, it was the history of philosophy, which was mainly cultivated in our country. If we were Hegelians – which Professor Ayer is positively not, and I would not call myself by that name either –, Ayer's statement would loose almost all of its critical sting because, according to Hegel, „*die Geschichte einer Sache ist die Sache selbst*”. It is an established fact that in order to understand immanently a thinker of an earlier age, we must as thoroughly as possible project ourselves into his own historical and logical situation – that is to say that in order to understand Hegel it is not a bad methodological „wrinkle” to be

come, at least for the time being a Hegelian. The promotion of this methodological expedient to a general view would, however, lead to a bad sort of historicism, and, through the logical liberalism of „tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner", to an even more anarchical (though more sentimental and more poetical) relativism than the variant we have rejected previously.

The course I wish to choose eventually is itself „*history-minded*", but – so I hope at least – only to such an extent as is not only admissible, but also necessary. It is common knowledge, perhaps already even a truism, that a philosopher often regards as problematic what others hold to be obvious, and that – conversely – he fails to find any problem in what gives others plenty of headache. Let me set out from the familiar (and therefore often neglected) difference which exists between philosophy and the specialized branches of learning, and which is even more pronounced in the category of historicity. How is it that nothing is more difficult than to make a really original statement in philosophy (this statement itself is not original, being at least as old as King Solomon), whereas in the specialized branches of learning – especially in the exact sciences – sensational new results are born every day? How is it that whereas in the specialized branches of learning even new-fledged talents may immediately come upon noteworthy new truths, in philosophy even leading figures often win fame only by their cast of thought and their style, but not owing to the novelty of their findings? How is it that in the specialized branches of learning the sound new doctrine gains admittance into the up to date store valid statements of the province in question, and the old conception proved false by it is relegated to the exploded deadstock of the history of science –, whereas in philosophy everything must be always started „afresh", everything becomes obsolete, and nothing ever begins to date, while the profession is forced to drag on the endlessly increasing burden of its own history?

The answer is disenchantingly, but also reassuringly, simple. Philosophy is concerned with the fundamental problems, but these are, by definition, very few in number. Philosophers toil therefore with attempts at new solutions of the same „old" problems, and the history of philosophy consists, in this regard, but of an unremitting fresh formulation – on the basis of humanity's ever increasing natural, social and psychological knowledge – of fundamental problems studied for a long time past, and of an attempt to give an answer to them. In this sense the *originality* of the philosopher may be – paradoxically – measured just, by what is *not original* in him, that is by the traditional problems which he treats, and by their novel, original handling.

When coming here – at last – to the rather thorny question of Hegel's position on religion and atheism, we have not only to determine the corresponding traits of the historically authentic image of Hegel, but principally to clarify in what his point of view has forwarded or (perhaps set back) the fundamental problems examined. *This* is the crucial question, and only a sound answer can settle the secondary, though seemingly much more colourful, problem: Who is right, the existentialists, the marxists, the atheists, the Catholic or the Protestant theologians, who all want to consider Hegel their own forerunner, or adversary?

Hegel is a „*historical*" thinker, in the sense that he not only endeavours to formulate almost all the fundamental questions of philosophy, but that he is always

taking into account all their antecedents and variants that have emerged in the course of the history of philosophy; to him philosophy is truly identical with its own history. An obvious thing to do would be to examine in Hegel's oeuvre the most important question of philosophy: the problem of *being and consciousness*. What is the new he has been able to bring here, as compared with the old variants? Part of the answer can be given so clearly that it is bit of moderate interest to us: Hegel is a classic representative of the 19th century, classic variant of objective idealism, of the ontology and metaphysics which endeavour to go beyond Kant: I don't think that this wording would be called in question by any present-day trend in the interpretation of Hegel. On the other hand, as regards the problem of what else Hegel has been able to contribute to the solution of the fundamental problem of being and consciousness, this is – in my humble opinion – a question which at present does not yet permit of an answer; in Hegel's formulation of the derived problems of body-mind, subject-object, personality and collectivity, etc. we are confronted, in a hypothetical and abstract form (primarily for psychology and social psychology), with a research program, the soundness of which may be, either in part or as a whole, verified, corrected, or rejected – for philosophy – only by several decades of specialized research. This is why we refrain from choosing this part of his philosophy.

It would be reasonable to examine the problem of *dialectics*, because this is truly the „soul” of Hegel's philosophy and because at the same time both its historical and its actual importance are indisputable. Let me offer in this very connection a methodological remark. As a matter of course, every philosophy has an ideological character, on account of its claim to explain the whole world, as done also by religion or art. But not all questions of philosophy (and not in every age) have an equally strong „*ideological charge and saturation*”. In order to enable at all a concrete dialogue, a truly philosophical controversy between present-day philosophical trends representing different ideologies, one which would amount to more than a declaration of the good intent of entering into a discussion, – it is necessary to select, of all the fundamental questions, those with the relatively weakest ideological charge – and it is on this field where an agreement must first of all be reached, primarily as regards terminology. Only if one has thus managed to reach notions, which are used in the same sense by both arguing parties, will it become possible – in the hope of achieving a *recull* – to proceed, by means of these „neutral” concepts, to a discussion of knottier ideological problems.

Hegel's „authentic” views on religion and atheism can – to come at last „ad fortissimum” – be elucidated by the aid of two such „relatively neutral” fundamental questions. Both belong to the classical store of philosophy, one being the question of *duplex veritas*, the other that of the *absolute spirit* (or absolute mind).

The modern history of European philosophy may be indeed looked upon as a *break-up* into religion and philosophy of an essentially homogeneous mediaeval religious world view. This process started approximately in the middle of the 13th century, mainly in Paris, where at this time Thomas Aquinas – after some own initial „*deviation*” – had turned against the „*heterodox*” views known as Averroism (and professed by Siger of Brabant, Boetius of Dacia and others), which were the radical, clearly formulated continuations of earlier, but inefficacious English and

Arabic initiatives. Duplex veritas, that is the doctrine of the logical coequality of religion and philosophy – though it attacks from the outset the monocracy of religion, and is thus essentially offensive –, was at first, for philosophy, a means used for defensive purposes, namely, to extricate itself from the status of „*ancilla theologiae*” to attain a „*domiciliary separation*”, and to escape the tyranny of being continually denounced on religious grounds. We know that this fight for the freedom of science, after the great victories of the Renaissance and Humanism, and subsequently after the fierce backlash of the Counter-Reformation, has reached, with Hobbes and the 18th century French materialists, a point where the doctrine professed was once again not duplex veritas, but una veritas, but this time already in the sense of a supremacy of atheistic philosophy. This victory was, however, confined to France, and here too it proved only temporary. Kant’s philosophy implies again the standpoint of duplex veritas. However, up to the present it has been impossible to ascertain whether the cardinal dualism of his system, by strictly drawing the line between philosophy and religion, intended to defend religion against the claims of philosophy, or just the opposite: whether he, as a great admirer of the French Revolution, did not rather try to defend philosophy, which had hardly won its independence, against the influence of religion, which was gaining again more and more in force after the collapse of the revolution.

In *this* historical and logical situation the position taken up by Hegel has been of prime importance, quite irrespective of any false revaluation. I must repeat: it is not in homage to his personal creative genius that we must deal with his position, but because he stands on such a „crossroad” of European thought where we must either *overcome* him, or turn *behind* him, but where it is impossible to *by-pass* him. In this respect there exists positively no third road, no triplex veritas.

Duplex veritas is one of the variants of the compromising solutions touching the relationship between faith and knowledge. Under the title „Glaube und Wissen” Hegel wrote in 1802 one of his most important great treatises.¹ This was at a time when, after his early essays, a kind of conversion occurred in his life; when the period, called theological by Dilthey, and crisis of republicanism by Lukács, came to an end, and Hegel set himself to build up the system of objective idealism, which was to be crowned, in 1807, by his „*Phänomenologie des Geistes*”. It is a generally ignored fact, and one perhaps usually not even noticed, that the treatise is devoted to the fundamental question of duplex veritas. It is disregarded because this work is in fact, somewhat surprisingly, not devoted to the duplex veritas, but to three *philosophers*, whom Hegel wants to overcome, namely to Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte. *Essentially*, however, Hegel is here quite obviously concerned with the relationship between faith and knowledge, seeing that he rejects all three philosophers for the very reason that they are unable to answer appropriately *this* question. Moreover, faithful to his own conception (the history of a thing is the thing itself), he discerns in the Enlightenment, or rather in the philosophy of Kant, the culmination of all the past history of duplex veritas, as we too have in the preceding short outline of the history of this problem. „Über den alten Gegensatz der

¹ Originally published in issue 2 of the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*.

Vernunft und des Glaubens, von Philosophie und positiver Religion – he writes – hat die Kultur die letzte Zeit so erhoben, dass diese Entgegensetzung von Glauben und Wissen einen ganz anderen Sinn gewonnen hat ... Dass die Vernunft eine Magd des Glaubens sei, wie man sich in älteren Zeiten ausdrückte, und wogegen die Philosophie unüberwindlich ihre absolute Autonomie behauptete – diese Vorstellungen oder Ausdrücke sind verschwunden.” Thus Hegel is aware of the victory of the Enlightenment and accurately formulates it. He is, however, by no means satisfied with this victory. Not that he had, as the later left-wing Hegelians, found it incomplete, but he did not find it overmuch either, as the religious thinkers have done at that time – and also ever since. Hegel wishes to *overcome* all these standpoints, and, in our opinion, this is the essence of his position on religion and atheism – and this is the core of this somewhat circumstantial analysis of ours too. „Es ist aber die Frage – writes Hegel shrewdly setting forth his doubts about the achievements of the Enlightenment – ob die Sieger in Vernunft nicht eben das Schicksal erfuhr, welches die siegende Stärke barbarischer Nationen gegen die unterliegende Schwäche gebildeter zu haben pflegt: der äusseren Herrschaft nach die Oberhand zu behalten, dem Geiste nach aber dem Überwundenen zu erliegen”.² That is to say: the enlighteners have – according to Hegel – overcome concrete „positive” religion, but the price they paid for this was its replacement by a substitute, or a surrogate religion which was, both as a religion and as a philosophy, worse than the previous one; and they made philosophy once more an „ancilla” to this substitute religion.

Hegel’s stand on this question is quite clear, a fact which – strangely enough – is rather obscured than emphasized by most commentators. His own evolution (as also the history of German society) had reached a point, where, having already emerged from initial uncertainties, he became entirely aware of the relations of his own philosophy to the theology and philosophy of the predecessors, but the compulsion of creating a „system” of his own, did not yet lead him to forced formulations. All along he deals strictly with duplex veritas, with the relationship between faith and knowledge. He rejects Kant’s dualism, not only because it is a dualism, but because what Kant permits as a religion „innerhalb der Grenzen des gesunden Menschenverstandes” is very meagre and primitive even for a faith. He rejects Jacobi’s dualism too, on the one hand, because it is irrationalist, on the other, because the sentimental religiosity „defended” by Jacobi is but a return to the devout, old-womanly pre-Enlightenment religiosity. Ultimately he rejects also Fichte’s conception, because, though as an idealism it assigns to the human subject a part in the homogeneous world concept, the price paid for this is that his system is a subjective idealism, and that the actual connection with the Object gets lost.

What Hegel aspires in the relationship between religion and philosophy, is (in plain English) to *overcome* the simple negation which was the attitude of the Enlightenment in regard to religion. He does not want to stop at Kant’s parallelism, which simply leaves the question open; nor to revert to the stand taken by Jacobi,

² Hegel, Glaube und Wissen. (Sämtliche Werke, Bd. 1. 1927, p. 279.

because this is not philosophy (and weak even as a religion); nor is he satisfied with Fichte's position either, which is not able to secure human freedom except in a speculative, fictive manner. That is: by putting to account the critical achievements of the Enlightenment, we must proceed to a higher religion; the Enlightenment has negated positive religions, and it is by negating, ending, retaining, and raising this negation onto a higher plane, where a „new” world view has to be formulated, in which, there shall be no more difference between philosophy and religion.

It is clearly thus that one must interpret Hegel's often quoted (and misinterpreted) famous words, too, which are generally torn not only out of the context of the treatise in question, but also out of the whole of the history of duplex veritas; the feeling – pervading the whole of modern religion – that „*God himself is dead*”, has been formulated by the Enlightenment in all its conceptual rigour; but this severe assertion was only a „*speculative Good-Friday*”, from which „*the highest totality, in all its seriousness and depth, all-embracingly and in the serenest form of its liberty, can and must rise again*”.³

This, then, is – as reflected by the problem of duplex veritas – Hegel's relation to religion and atheism: he negates the historical and positive religions, endorsing the devastating criticism levelled at them by the Enlightenment; but – beyond that – he negates also atheism, since he speaks of the „rebirth” of a higher religion. No wonder, thus, that then and now the most contrasting philosophical trends have been able to discover in him their own „forerunner”, as long as they contented themselves with one or another portion of the *whole* Hegel, and with this or that aspect of his complex „personal reference framework” (–Weltanschauung.) If, however, we take into consideration the Hegelian system as a whole, then the fact that in the evolutionary succession of art, religion and philosophy, it is philosophy which comes topmost, will already in itself induce us to decide, that it is only one religion which may count on the support of Hegelian philosophy – namely, the philosophy to come, as foretold by Hegel.

No marvel, then, if orthodox, righth-wing integrist theologians, like Siegmund, have sharply turned against Hegel's philosophy, gladly accepting György Lukács's somewhat pointed formulation, according to which Hegel's conception is, on the face of it, an exoteric deism, whereas its latent, esoteric essence is actually – atheism. However it is no less logical, that more „opportunistic” theologians, like R. Vancourt, earnestly declare that respecting the future of religion one might draw also favourable inferences from Hegel.

To the question as to what might be the thought-content of Hegel's new „religion”, and of how we have, in consequence, to assess it, we may get an answer by throwing – be it now ever so briefly – a glance at the other fundamental question mentioned above, that of the *absolute spirit*. Logically enough this was, also in the course of the history of philosophy, always associated with the problem of duplex veritas, beginning with Alexander of Aphrodisias up to Averroes and other commentators of Aristotle, continuing with Pomponazzi, and down to Kant. This is,

³ Hegel, op. cit., p. 433.

simply formulated, the problem of the *intellectus agens* and the *anima activa*, in close connection with the problems of emanation and participation, as well as with those of the structure and immortality of the soul. It is the claim to totality of every religion which finds its formulation here, and comes up forthwith against the claim to totality of every philosophy – hence the proximity of duplex veritas. On this point of the „history” of ideas, the question under discussion is thus, once more, not some affectedly original or brilliant „invention” of Hegel’s, but an ancient philosophical problem which has its modern, actual sense even today. As a matter of fact, the claim to a „total” explanation of the world, which makes philosophy, religion, and art, rivals, springs on the one hand, from the only too real fact that the thoughts, ideas, ideals, concepts, values, creations, etc. called into existence by humanity, persist „somehow” in the succession of generations – and, on the other hand, from the similarly real psychological fact that the individual somehow „partakes” in this all-human continuum. Moreover, this very partaking is so important from a philo- and ontogenetic point of view, that it may be considered with good reason the specific element of the particularly human „essence”, its condition sine qua non (which religious thinkers are then wont to distort by saying that religion is, among living beings, the differentia specifica of man.) These once mystical, and even by Hegel too pathetically formulated relations can be given a very rational and sensible meaning if we define them as follows: absolute spirit is but the aggregate of humanly possible informations past and future.

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The characterization of the Hegelian conception of religion and atheism I have given here cannot, in the strict sense of the word, be regarded as being of historical nature, and even less as an attempted application of historical materialism. What I have endeavoured to offer is not more than a preliminary study to all this: a descriptive, logical arranging operation in the domain of the Hegelian variants and interrelations of the fundamental questions envisaged. Such an inquiry is still „on this side” of the water parting between materialism and idealism – and for this very reason also of a historical explanation proper, which thus must follow only thereupon. One thing seems, however, certain already on this level, to wit, that – as in his whole oeuvre – Hegel has also, in regard to the question of religion and atheism, spared no effort to solve monistically the interrelation between world and man, as well as the human character of the world, and the wordly character of man. His proposed solution is idealistic in the strictest sense of the word, and the Phenomenology of Mind indelibly bears the marks of a biblical origin: the Word was made flesh. But – even in spite of his idealistic position – the structure revealed by him regarding that really existing „*mundus intelligibilis*”, that spiritual continuum which, for lack of a better expression, we are calling human spirit, and which actually links man with humanity, is such a really existing and working (sit venia verbo) „mechanism” in the relationship between man and the world, as has attained its present complexity in the course of the long history of natural evolution and social progress. In this respect, even though the Hegelian super-religion is liable

to remain an idealistic hypothesis, the conception itself may become a scientific research program for all those sciences, which, aware of the objective importance and of the laws of subjectivity, are concerning themselves with the spiritual and intellectual problems of the human subject. The only difference – which is, of course, most essential, stemming as it does from the concrete psychological and social facts of historicity – is that Hegel's vision is a *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, a progressive realization of the spirit; whereas the scientific program is the *Noumenology* of the body, the progressive spiritualization, self-realization of man.